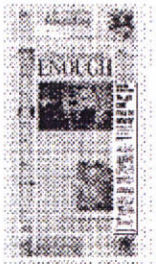




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LAWS FOR IMMIGRATION

Tough talk may be empty

■ Crackdown
can hurt many

industries

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They buy groceries in local stores and send their children to local schools.

They work and live among us — but their presence in the United States is not documented.

These are the people, living in the shadows, who are the focus of a host of bills that have been pre-filed in the Texas Legislature that would crack down on illegal immigration.

Some of the bills are conservative favorites that have failed in past sessions of the Legislature, but some are new — and they would dramatically change the state's policies toward the estimated 1.7 million undocumented immigrants living in Texas.

Among the questions law-

makers will have to answer when the 82nd Legislature convenes in January:

■ Should Texas adopt laws like those in Arizona that allow police officers to ask about the immigration status of residents they encounter and to make arrests based on the answer?

■ Should students at public schools be required to show proof of citizenship so school districts can report how many illegal immigrants they serve?

■ Should cities or counties deemed to be providing sanctuary to undocumented immigrants be stripped of state funding?

■ Should state agencies publish materials only in English?

■ Should voters be required to show photo identification at the polls to prevent voter fraud among undocumented immigrants?

Please see IMMIGRATION, 10A

AT A GLANCE

Here's a quick look at some of the immigration-related bills that were pre-filed in the Texas Legislature last week.

S.B. 178 — Would require voters to present photo identification at the ballot box. (Sen. Troy Fraser, R-Horseshoe Bay)

H.B. 17 — Would make it a crime to be in the U.S. illegally and would give police officers the right to arrest undocumented immigrants who are trespassing. (Rep. Debbie Riddle, R-Tomball)

H.B. 18 — Would strip funding from local governments if they are found to be pro-

viding sanctuary to illegal immigrants. (Riddle)

H.B. 21 — Would require state agencies to report how much they spend directly or indirectly on undocumented immigrants. (Riddle)

H.B. 22 — Would require school districts to determine the immigration status of all of their students and report the number of immigrants they serve to the state. (Riddle)

H.B. 81 — Would require state agencies to print all documents paid for with public money in English only. (Rep. Dan Flynn, R-Van)



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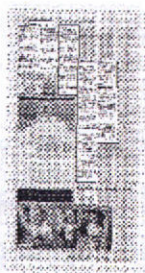
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IMMIGRATION from 1A

Emotions run high on both sides of these controversial questions, and lawmakers will have to work through them as they're dealing with a massive budget shortfall and the once-a-decade redistricting process.

Some lawmakers see the big success of Republicans in the recent general election as a mandate from voters to take a hard-line approach against illegal immigration.

But some believe the federal government — rather than the state — should be responsible for immigration reform, and others worry about the social and economic effects the bills would have in the state that

shares the longest stretch of the Mexican border.

A CHANCE TO PASS?

State Sen. Troy Fraser, a Republican from Horseshoe Bay who represents Taylor County and several other Big Country counties, pre-filed a bill last week that would require voters to bring photo identification to the ballot box.

Fraser said voting illegally is easy to do in Texas, and he wants to prevent undocumented immigrants from casting ballots in elections.

Fraser said he believes voter fraud is pervasive, but he acknowledged that the claim cannot be substantiated because there isn't a way to determine how many ballots are cast illegally.

"The right to vote is our most precious right as a citizen, and all I'm trying to do is make sure the person voting

is who they say they are," Fraser said.

Fraser introduced a similar bill in 2009 that passed in the Senate, but it died in the House in the final days of the session.

"We're going to attempt to go ahead and try to move it earlier this year, and the belief is with the new members in the House, I think there's going to be sufficient members, and I suspect it probably will pass."

Fraser is referring to the significant shift in the makeup of the Texas House after the Nov. 2 election.

Before the election, Republicans held a slim 77 to 73 majority. Now, the GOP holds nearly two-thirds of the seats in the House — 99 seats to 51 for the Democrats.

Fraser and others said they think this will make it easier to pass bills that have been held up by Democrats in the past.

But not all Republicans are on board with the hard-line approach.

Gov. Rick Perry and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst have said they don't believe an Arizona-style law would be right in Texas.

Perry's recent campaign speeches were punctuated with jabs at the federal government's handling of border issues.

But at the same time, he doesn't want to alienate some

of his biggest supporters who rely on inexpensive immigrant labor in homebuilding and other construction industries, said Cal Jillson, professor of political science at Southern Methodist University.

"He's had the best of both worlds in that he's been able to rail against the federal government for not fulfilling its responsibilities on border control and immigration more generally, while not doing much himself," Jillson said. "The homebuilding industry has a great many people of ambiguous documentation building homes."

In the past, the business community in Texas has opposed major immigration proposals that would close the border or put pressure on illegal workers who already are in the state because many businesses thrive on low-cost workers, Jillson said.

The immigration bills filed this session will provide insight into Perry's authority in the Legislature, and in the end, Jillson doesn't believe the most extreme bills will pass.

Neither does Jim Harrington, executive director of the Texas Civil Rights Project, who believes the session will reveal whether Perry is seriously considering running for president in 2012.

"We may see the Bush phenomenon happen — when Bush was governor — in that no controversial legislation got passed (the session before the election)," Harrington said.

Most Republicans won't support the legislation if they're serious about reaching out to the Hispanic community, Harrington said.

He said the anti-immigration bills that have been filed amount to "demagoguery," and a distraction from the work lawmakers must tackle with the budget deficit or education funding.

But the issue was taken so seriously by state Rep. Debbie Riddle, R-Tomball, that she camped outside the House clerk's office for two nights just so she could be first in line to file a bundle of immigration-related bills, including one that would style Texas law after Arizona's.

In an interview with Fox News host Greta Van Susteren, Riddle said she filed her bundle of bills because she was concerned about the increase in gang-related crimes in Houston that could be linked to Mexican drug cartels. Riddle could not be reached for comment for this article.

"The bottom line is this: This is all about safety and security," Riddle told Van Susteren.

MEASURING IMPACT

The number of undocumented immigrants in Texas grew 54 percent from 2000 to 2009 — an average increase of about 70,000 immigrants per year, according to estimates from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

In 2009, the most recent figures available, Texas was

home to about 16 percent of the nation's undocumented immigrants, the second biggest population among the states. About 24 percent of immigrants lived in California in 2009.

But the number of illegal immigrants in Texas and in the U.S. has been decreasing since 2007, the statistics show.

Federal data isn't broken down by county or city, but a local immigration case worker has noticed a decrease in the number of undocumented immigrants in Abilene.

Nelly Diaz, an accredited advocate for immigration associated with the Catholic Diocese of San Angelo,

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said she gets 40 calls a day and works in person with about 25 people a week on immigration issues, but she believes there are fewer immigrants in Abilene.

There haven't been many jobs available throughout

grant workers, but Diaz also said she believes fewer immigrants are moving to Texas because they fear the anti-immigration tide that's sweeping the state. Instead of punitive legislation, Diaz would rather see immigrants offered a path to citizenship and an opportunity to attend college.

Many of the bills that already have been filed, however, would attempt to curb illegal immigration. The legislation undoubtedly

would have an impact on the region — not only people living here illegally but also the cities, counties and schools.

One bill would strip funding from local governments that provide sanctuary to undocumented immigrants.

"Abilene is not a sanctuary city," said Abilene Police Chief Stan Standridge. "Within policy, we collaborate with federal law enforcement partners concerning immigration issues."

Officers who contact illegal immigrants through an investigation notify Border Patrol about their immigration status, Standridge said. The department does not make arrests with immigration status in mind because state law

does not give Texas law enforcement officers that discretion — but one of the proposed laws would change that.

If the bill passes, APD's policy regarding illegal immigrants would have to change. The policy currently says undocumented immigrants "may not be arrested without a warrant based solely upon the suspicion they entered the country illegally. When a suspected illegal alien is arrested, the United States Border Patrol should be notified."

Taylor County Judge Downing Bolls said he didn't have an opinion on specific immigration legislation that will be debated, but he hoped that the state would attach funding to any bills that would require the county to spend money.

Another bill that already has been filed would require public school students to submit proof of citizenship upon registering; and then school districts would report the number of immigrants they serve to the state.

Jillson, the SMU professor, said that bill could dangerously affect the quality of the future workforce because many undocumented parents would be discouraged

from taking their children to school.

Isaiah Butler, coordinator of the United Methodist Service Center and Food Pantries, works with some members of the undocumented immigrant population in

Abilene, and she also had experience working with their children as a bilingual teacher for 25 years.

Butler said she agrees that parents would keep their children out of schools if they had to admit they were here illegally.

"It's better to have them in school and learning than to be on the streets," Butler said.

The 82nd Legislature will be in session from Jan. 11 through May 30.